



Community engagement through international service-learning: How a foreign student can become a functioning social actor in the host society

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Summary

The International Center for Intercultural Exchange (Center) in Siena, Italy will present the results of a comparative study carried out on students in its cultural immersion programs (service-learning/community engagement program and academic program) to demonstrate the development of reflective intercultural competence, assessed through the use of the Biagi-Bracci RICA (Reflective Intercultural Competence Assessment) Model (2012). RICA identifies six levels of reflective intercultural competence development, the highest of which is defined as Social Acting.

The Center has created a set of education and cultural immersion programs for college and university students from non-Italian backgrounds. Center faculty and staff have designed the Full Immersion: Culture, Content and Service (FICCS) approach (Bracci & Filippone, 2010), which, paired with

reflective education, is designed to give students a much deeper engagement with and understanding of the many dimensions of Italian culture and language.

The percentage of students that achieved the Social Acting level was significantly higher among service-learning students, supporting the contention that direct engagement with the host society through experience in third-sector organizations provides an irreplaceable tool for cultural immersion.

We will present a brief historical background of third-sector organizations in Siena as well as the origins of the Center. We will then illustrate how the practice of international service-learning and community engagement in the host society's third-sector leads to the significant results in our ongoing study and how it is possible that a foreign student is able to become a functioning social actor in the host society.

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